



# Response by Bus Users UK to the Net Zero Review: Call for Evidence

## Overarching Questions

### **Q1 How does Net Zero enable us to meet economic growth targets?**

Consumers are much more demanding in terms of sustainability, with 70%<sup>1</sup> of them seeking that information prior to purchase. This issue influences brand perception and advocacy, which will affect performance over the longer-term. The bus and coach industries have invested heavily in 'greener' technology to enable their vehicles to meet emissions standards and customer demand and this is attracting passengers who have a choice of transport mode, leaving their private cars at home and causing less congestion on the road network. It is clear, therefore, that growth targets will only be achieved if all consumer-facing businesses and their chosen suppliers adopt sustainable practices.

### **Q2 What challenges and obstacles have you identified to decarbonisation?**

There are insufficient funds available for the whole bus fleet to decarbonise and the persistent exemptions given to operators who are not PSVAR compliant means that many of the smaller coach operators still operate inaccessible diesel fleets. As they have lower outgoings, this means that the majority of school bus services provided by coach operators have an unfair advantage over operators who have invested when competing for school service tenders. Children therefore, are exposed to more polluting services than should be the case and disabled students cannot travel with their peers.

Other obstacles include the high cost of electric vehicles to private consumers, a lack of accessible and affordable charging points throughout the country, especially in suburban and rural areas, and the threat posed by the lack of sufficient power being generated if all vehicles became electric in a short period of time.

In terms of environmental policy, it is clear that the pace of change is not matched by a commitment to recycling large vehicle batteries in a sustainable way.

### **Q4 What more could government do to support decarbonisation?**

Funding for the purchase of cleaner bus and coach fleets could be increased and made easier to access. More measures could be encouraged to remove private cars from town and city centres and road pricing introduced in all urban areas to motivate a modal shift away from private car use. Ring-fenced funding for affordable local bus provision beyond what is deemed commercially viable would raise confidence in potential passengers and increase numbers, allowing services to become self-funding. Growing passenger numbers creates more growth<sup>2</sup> as bus users create more than

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<sup>1</sup> [Exploring UK Consumer Interest in Sustainability | BCG](#)

<sup>2</sup> [The-Value-of-the-Bus-to-Society-FINAL.pdf \(greener-vision.com\)](#)

£64 billion worth of goods and services, so more needs to be done in terms of policy and funding to achieve this.

#### **Q5 In what areas of policy could Net Zero be achieved more efficiently?**

Public transport is a key actor in the route to Net Zero and much resource needs to be made available to make this the mode of choice for as many consumers as possible. Separation of bus and coach from walking and cycling as if they are somehow not related to active travel is illogical and unsustainable in the current climate. Silo working in this way often leads to unusable options for consumers and sets up new barriers. Requiring transport planners to work with Employment, Education, Healthcare, Social Services, Housing and Environment teams would make joined-up communities far more liveable and encourage much more exploration of greener transport solutions.

Government could also ensure that local authorities have a duty to ensure socially necessary transport is put in place and not simply a power as outlined in the Transport Act 1985 (section 63)<sup>3</sup> and remove some of the more complex requirements for bus operators, such as the need to put large sums beyond use in order to be deemed appropriate. As this cannot be used in the event of a downturn to enable the continuation of services, it seems pointless and acts as a barrier to entrepreneurs or community groups wishing to enter this market.

Government could also simplify the Traffic Commissioner role by separating the HGV/Bus supervisory roles to have a specialist Traffic Commissioner(s) overseeing this market, with a clear requirement for Bus Commissioners to have regard to the interests of passengers, like every other industry Regulator.

#### **Questions for Business**

#### **Q8 What growth benefits do you see as possible from Net Zero transition?**

There are clear growth benefits to investing in greener transport options, particularly by investing in bus. Buses are the primary mode of access to city centres and are responsible for facilitating 29% of all city centre expenditure<sup>4</sup>. In addition, the same Greener Journeys report shows that there is a significant relationship between accessibility by bus and employment, with a 10% improvement in access to bus services meaning 50,000 more people in work.

It seems clear that a transition to Net Zero requires a significant and ongoing investment in public transport if the anticipated benefits of doing so are to be achieved.

#### **Questions for the public**

#### **Q18 What personal action is being taken to reduce carbon emissions?**

The UK's biggest contribution to Greenhouse Gas emissions is from transport. As a charity representing the concerns of bus and coach passengers, we are seeing clear signals that many more people are choosing to use public transport to reduce their carbon footprint. A Which survey<sup>5</sup> showed that 94% of consumers are concerned about climate change, pollution and biodiversity with 33% focusing their efforts on more sustainable transport and a further 28% considering how they could change their travel pattern.

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<sup>3</sup> [Transport Act 1985 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

<sup>4</sup> [The Value of the Bus to Society-FINAL.pdf \(greener-vision.com\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Consumers and sustainability - Which? Consumer Insight](#)

Bus is clearly the easiest and most flexible means of improving an individual's impact on Net Zero targets and roadside pollution is an area of concern for many, especially those with children. As the UK Government's own studies reveal: "Poor air quality is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK, as long-term exposure to air pollution can cause chronic conditions such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases as well as lung cancer, leading to reduced life expectancy."<sup>6</sup>

Research by the University of Westminster<sup>7</sup> showed that effective bus priority measures can deliver up to 75% fewer emissions per bus passenger per kilometre than for car passengers, and Greener Journeys work with LowCVP<sup>8</sup> demonstrated that low emissions buses are a crucial part of the solution to reducing roadside pollution.

It is critical then, that the approaches of individuals to address their own personal carbon footprint should be encouraged, in particular by widely promoting the environmental benefits of travelling by bus locally or coach/train for longer journeys as these choices will have a direct impact on the contribution of transport on the environment. These choices should also be reflected in the decisions of government representatives travelling on official business.

#### **Q19 Do you face barriers to doing this?**

It is often very difficult for individuals to find information about the environmental impacts of various travel choices. Most websites and apps giving useful information are focused on a specific area so planning for longer journeys can require intensive work. While the most dedicated searcher can access much of the information they need, the average person falls back on guesses and habits.

Many sites aimed at reducing our carbon footprint are focused on cycling and walking, which should certainly be part of the mix. However, these are not realistic options for many people and unappealing at various times of the year because of poor weather or light conditions, a lack of pavement or safe pathways and the continual inconsiderate pavement parking, all of which also affects people trying to get to a bus stop, especially those with children, mobility aids or luggage.

#### **Q20 What would help people make greener choices?**

1. An all-encompassing source of information that is free-to-use and accessible by a freephone number to ensure nobody is digitally excluded from making good travel decisions.
2. Clear and sustained funding from central government for a reasonable level of local bus services to be sustained throughout the country, especially in rural areas. This would improve confidence that journeys will be possible and allow people to get into new greener habits.
3. Regular consultation with communities about their travel needs in order to keep services current and in tune with the people they serve, along with a multi-modal approach as many journeys include more than one transport method but they are often not coordinated in any way.
4. All travel options should be accessible, affordable and reliable if people are to be convinced to try different options.
5. Sustained dissuasion of private motorists alongside the 'carrot' of better public transport. Workplace parking levies, road pricing, congestion charging, rerouting of traffic around town and city centres etc will all have impacts on the convenience factor of each mode. With the latest research from Campaign for Better Transport<sup>9</sup> showing that fewer than a fifth of people oppose

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<sup>6</sup> [Health matters: air pollution - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/health-matters/air-pollution)

<sup>7</sup> University of Westminster, Impact of bus priorities and busways on energy efficiency and emissions,

<sup>8</sup> Low CVP, The Journey of the Green Bus,

<sup>9</sup> [Pay-as-you-drive 4-page Flyer September 2022 \(windows.net\)](https://www.windows.net/pay-as-you-drive-4-page-flyer-september-2022)

the idea of replacing fuel duty and road tax with a pay-as-you-drive system, it is timely to begin introducing such measures as soon as possible.

### **Questions for those delivering locally**

#### **Q27 How can the delivery of Net Zero programmes be improved?**

There have been various initiatives to support the introduction of Net Zero initiatives but these have been spread out among various policies, strategies and funds with, apparently, no central point aiming to get a coordinated approach to this work.

BSIP applications are long and have been work-intensive, requiring a lot of investment of time and energy in order to potentially result in no funding.

Likewise the ZEBRA fund, SUELB and their predecessors make funds available to some but not the majority so the results are patchy and occasionally anti-competitive.

Having a single contact for funding applications would remove a lot of the bureaucracy from potential service operators and enable the fund managers to use funds from the relevant 'pots' to support innovative ideas which meet various government ambitions without having to submit several different bids. This would encourage smaller operators to apply and would support 'joined-up thinking' by local authorities and transport operators.

Removing the exemptions from PSVAR would enable all coach companies to compete on a level playing field for school contracts, touring holidays and event transport which, in turn, would enable all passengers to plan journeys with confidence, supporting their journey to a lower-carbon future.

### **About Bus Users**

Bus Users is a charity that campaigns for inclusive, accessible transport. We are the only approved Alternative Dispute Resolution Body for the bus and coach industry and the designated body for handling complaints under the Passenger Rights in Bus and Coach Legislation. We are also part of a Sustainable Transport Alliance, a group working to promote the benefits of public, shared and active travel.

Alongside our complaints work we investigate and monitor services and work with operators and transport providers to improve services for everyone. We run events, carry out research, respond to consultations, speak at government select committees and take part in industry events to make sure the voice of the passenger is heard.

Bus Users UK Charitable Trust Ltd is a registered charity (1178677 and SC049144) and a Company Limited by Guarantee (04635458).

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